

You're worth it: Putting health before work

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Outline

My cancer journey thus far (Craig)

The perspective of a primary caretaker (Marion)

What I missed, what I learned, and portable health lessons for all of us (Craig)

My Cancer Timeline

- | | |
|----------|---|
| Jan | -Serious talk initiated by my wife Marion |
| Feb 13 | -Surprise! you have cancer |
| Feb 14 | -Worst Valentine's day ever (Surprise! It's Stage IV) |
| Feb 28 | -Chemo starts |
| April 21 | -Worst anniversary ever |
| June 20 | -Back to the endoscopy center |
| July 20 | -Surgery |
| Oct 11 | -End of chemotherapy |
| | -Mopping up last details |
| | -My odds of living to die of something else |

What helped me and what not so much...

Great helps:

Cards, phone calls, texts, email messages

Care packages to get me through, practical and not

Support from OVPIT leadership and UITs staff as well as friends and family

Not as much:

Just telling me “you got this.” Because I sure didn’t

The perspective of the primary caregiver

There is no good reason for me to have had colon cancer . . . But I did. What happened?

- No family history of cancer except associated with Tobacco use
- Checked over head to toe in 2011
- Chronically fit
- Vegan / pescatarian diet since 2003
- None of the most typical symptoms

But I did have colon cancer. What happened?

- I focused too much on high probability health risks and not enough to low probability risks
- I let myself fall into a relationship with my Primary Care Physician in which I did not have full trust in my PCP and neither fixed that nor fired my PCP to get a new one
- Stupidly high pain tolerance
- Red-Green colorblind
- My primary care physician did not recommend annual tests that the AMA recommends
- And then I was embarrassed to discuss the signs of problems when I finally noticed them

We are all at more risk than we probably recognize

Overall cancer and heart attack rates are declining but deaths are increasing. From 2011-2014

- Heart disease deaths increased by 3%
- Cancer deaths rose by 2.6%

Colon and rectal cancer are increasing in younger people. From mid 1990s-2013

- For adults ages 20 to 39, colon cancer incidence increased by 1% to 2% per year
- In adults 40 to 54, colon cancer incidence increased by 0.5% to 1% per year from the mid-1990s through 2013.
- Rectal cancer incidence rates have been rising about 3% per year in adults ages 20 to 39
- Rectal cancer rates increased by 2% per year for adults 40 to 49

Strokes are on the rise in younger people

- From 2000 and 2010, hospitalizations for ischemic stroke, the most common type, dropped nearly 20 percent overall
- Among people ages 25 to 44, there was a sharp 44 percent increase in the rate.

Diabetes is rising drastically (sugar in processed food is just outrageous)

Breast cancer is a bit of good news in cancer incidence and treatment

Everyone will develop cancer on average 6 times in their life – but for about half the US population, the immune system will take care of it every time

IT workers are especially at risk

We are all very stressed

Most of us sit too much

Many of us are a bit on the heavy side

What I learned personally

- I didn't get sick because I worked a lot.
 - But working a lot without taking time out specifically to address my health comprehensively let cancer get farther along than it would have otherwise.
 - Working a lot gave me an excuse to rationalize away my symptoms
- There is no sense being embarrassed about bodily functions
- Fear is worse than grappling with a problem
- Cancer **really** sucks, but it sucks a lot worse for many other people than for me

Recommendations - Medical

- Have a good relationship with your primary care physician (and if you don't, fix it or get a new primary care physician)
- Take time out to look at your own health insurance policy. Get all of the diagnostic tests that are recommended, every time they are recommended by the AMA, as part of your annual physical, even if they are not covered by your insurance. Prevention is cheaper....
- After your physical, take a day to really sit down and focus on your health and do a careful assessment of where you are, and what actions you should take based on your own assessment
- Take advantage of every program you can within Healthy IU - <https://healthy.iu.edu>
- Ignore most of the medical information on the web
- If you or your loved one is over 50 and has not had a colonoscopy, just get one. The prep is worse than the procedure, and it's really not that bad.
- If you poop more than 3 times a day see a doctor, soon.

Recommendations – work and lifestyle

- The uber-recommendation: take time for your health, no matter what your age.
- Regard yourself as an IT worker as being in a high-risk category for health problems
- Get up every hour and walk around for 5 minutes
- Get a standup desk / desktop so you can do some of your computer work standing up
- Get your weight and girth to (or close to) AMA recommendations
- Exercise
- If you smoke, quit
- Consider adding some sort of mindfulness practice to your day (Tai Chi, Qui-Gong, Mind Body Stress Reduction, etc.). It has been well proven that mindfulness practices improve your physical health
- Recognize the difference between what you can and cannot control
- Make a rational plan for how you want to handle your own old age and death

10 silver linings for me

- 10) Reached my target weight for Boston qualifying attempt
- 9) Forced time to read, listen, reflect
- 8) Care packages
- 7) Hugs
- 6) Increased awareness of how good I have it
- 5) Added a new mission to my life: more focus on publicizing health awareness
- 4) Learned to receive and to be more compassionate with myself
- 3) Added mindfulness practices to my daily routine (esp Qi-gong and journaling)
- 2) Gut check on my faith and my relationships (If it's not o.k. to leave Marion alone at 60...)
- 1) A sufficiently hard whack on the side to force me to reinvent myself. My values did not change, but the way I implement them and the timescale on which I implement them changed a lot.

For more information

My blog: <https://www.caringbridge.org/visit/craigastewart>



<http://www.mindbodystressreduction.com>



<http://www.bloomingtoncenterformindfulness.com>

Mid-Day Mindfulness Practice

When Thu, October 5, 12:15pm – 12:45pm

Where IMU (locations vary, see link below) ([map](#))

Healthy.iu.edu



<http://www.chilei.com>

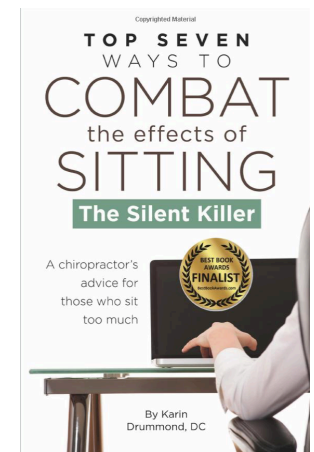
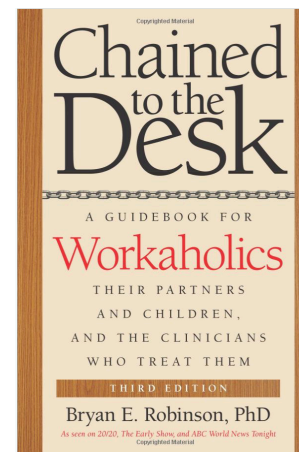
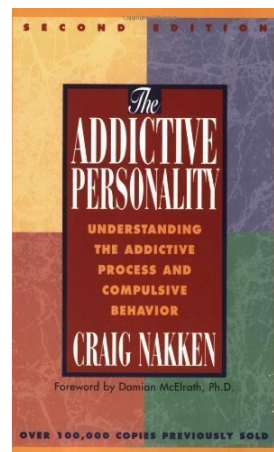
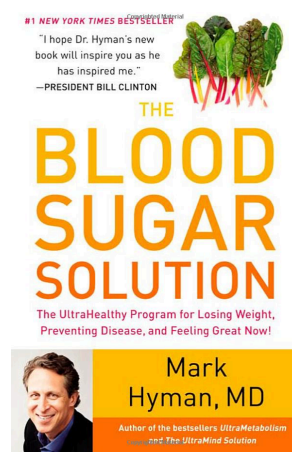
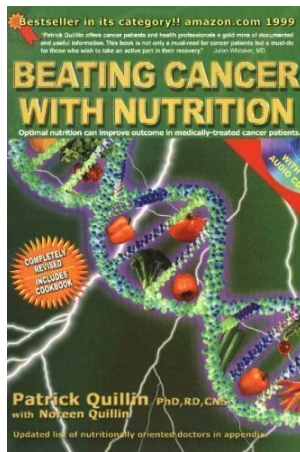


“This is water”

David Foster Wallace.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhhC_N6Bm_s

For more information



Thanks

- To my wife Marion, for saving my life
- Thanks to my children and their SOs (Kai & George, Tony & Kristen), and especially my grandkids Michael, Katja, Elan, and Madeline
- To Brad Wheeler, Matt Link, Von Welch, Therese Miller, Dave Hancock, and everyone in RT, PTI, the FO, UITs, OVPIT,
- Many friends and colleagues
- Winona Snapp-Childs, who edited more stuff written with Chemo-brain than any one person should ever have to
- Kevin Wohlever, for being an example of living well with an ostomy
- The medical teams at IU Simon Cancer Center, IU Health Hospital Indianapolis, and the (now) IU Health Infusion Center in Bloomington
- Everyone who participated in the IT5K fun run, and especially Daphne and ITCO and Dennis Cromwell, Alan Walsh, and Scott Michael for turning it into a fundraiser for the Simon Cancer Center
- You, for your kind attention



Ad astra per aspera

Questions?



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